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SUBJECT: Goma Situation Report for December 18, 2007

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Note: The following report was provided by Embassy Kinshasa's political officer in Goma. End note.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: FARDC is considering a new offensive against Nkunda forces despite recent reverses, and continue to fly in new supplies and equipment to Goma. MONUC does not believe it will be capable of doing so for months, and is counseling caution. Scattered combat continues. Supported by its attack helicopters, FARDC troops fought Nkunda forces to a standstill December 17 at Katale in Masisi, but have been unsuccessful at dislodging them from the strategic Gungu heights above the Goma-Rutshuru road, despite employing heavy artillery. Nkunda troops have vacated Celtel ridge above Sake, but remain in control of its summit as well as the nearby Kimoka ridge. To date, the FARDC has not moved against Katshire. FARDC forces in the Grand Nord are severely depleted as a result of the deployment against Nkunda positions further south. The meeting of the Congo-Rwanda Joint Verification Mechanism (JVM) is set for December 20 in Gisenyi. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Despite the fiasco of its Masisi campaign, FARDC is considering a new offensive against renegade General Laurent Nkunda, MONUC North Kivu Brigade Commander General Indrajeet Narayan told Goma poloff December 18 immediately prior to a meeting hosted by Eastern Division Commander Bikram Singh with FARDC Chief of Staff General Dieudonne Kayembe and 8th Military Region Commander General Vainqueur Mayala. Narayan said MONUC was attempting to talk FARDC out of the idea. He said no operations are possible for 4-6 months. He said Kayembe appears receptive, but Kabila's view remains unclear. In the meantime, he reported, FARDC is continuing to bring in new supplies and equipment to Goma.

¶3. (SBU) MONUC is counseling both sides to remain calm. In Narayan's view, "There is no way forward. There has to be a political-military solution." The problem now, he said, is that Nkunda is negotiating from a position of strength; he is refusing exile, and wants post-conflict status for himself and his political wing, the CNDP. Government forces are not capable of putting pressure on him. "They are panicking everywhere," Narayan said. "They have firepower and logistics, but no leadership." Colonel Delphin Kahimbi, deputy regional military commander, and Colonel Philemon Yav, commander of the 81st Brigade formerly headquartered in Masisi town, remain under a cloud. However, Colonel Jonas Padiri, the Tutsi commander of the 82nd, fought well and is now commanding FARDC forces at Sake. Land Forces Commander Gabriel Amisi is the target of charges he used \$100,000 to bribe commanders not to fight.

¶4. (SBU) Scattered combat continues. Narayan reported that FARDC troops at Katale in Masisi territory had successfully resisted an attack by Nkunda forces December 17. He said FARDC helicopters were

engaged in the fight, firing 80 rockets and multiple rounds of ammunition. MONUC ferried in fuel and munitions. A battalion of the FARDC 81st Brigade had abandoned Katale under no apparent pressure in the aftermath of last week's rout. Narayan said he had prevailed upon Kayembe and Mayala to order its return; they did so, reinforcing it with a battalion of the 85th (Mai-Mai) Brigade from Walikali territory. MONUC-Goma political chief Gernot Sauer reported that fighting had ended that day by 1600, with neither side gaining territory.

¶15. (SBU) At Rugari on the Goma-Rutshuru road, Narayan said FARDC had attempted unsuccessfully to dislodge Nkunda forces occupying the strategic Gungu heights. He said the FARDC troops there are "really scared" and do not stray much more than 100 meters from the road. Nkunda commander Colonel Sultani Makenga has mounted a 12.7mm machine gun on the heights with which his troops continue to control the road. Rather than assault the position, FARDC is using L-70 anti-aircraft guns to attempt to dislodge them. Narayan claimed use of such heavy artillery against more lightly-armed insurgents was a violation of the Geneva Convention. Sauer reported that a MONUC investigation of charges that shots by Nkunda troops at Rugari had killed a police officer called Bahati were false; in fact, it had been FARDC friendly fire.

¶16. (SBU) Elsewhere, Narayan reported that FARDC had deployed its 71st battalion to Kirotshe after Nkunda forces had beaten back an attack there by the Mai-Mai 3rd Resistance ("Cobra") Brigade. MONUC troops investigated reports that the hospital there had not been looted; they were false. He said FARDC had lost the JTN tea plantation, but not Nyanzale. He said there had been no FARDC movement against Katshire.

¶17. (SBU) Narayan said that Nkunda forces had vacated Celtel ridge above Sake town. MONUC forces now occupy the ridge and the area around its base, as well as the base of Kimoka ridge, which together

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with Celtel comprise the formation known as Sake heights. Nkunda forces retain Celtel summit and the remainder of Kimoka. Sauer reported that Ngungu, southwest of Sake, had been re-occupied by the 14th Integrated Brigade (IB). Elements of the 14th had apparently abandoned it in the panic that followed the brigade's rout, but it was not clear if Nkunda forces had ever re-taken it. Narayan said Kayembe has asked 10th Military Region (South Kivu) Military Commander General Sylvain Tshikweje to round up elements of the 14th IB that fled there.

¶18. (SBU) Sauer said that FARDC forces in the Grand North of North Kivu are "completely thinned out" as a result of the deployment of troops against Nkunda. He said it is not clear if they have the means to carry out a planned attack against the Baraka Mai-Mai, named after its 12-year old leader, "General" Baraka.

¶19. (SBU) Sauer reported that the meeting of the Congo-Rwanda Joint Verification Mechanism (JVM) is planned for December 20 in Gisenyi. He said it will feature high-level participation, including Rwandan Special Envoy Richard Sezibera and SRSG Swing; Congolese Foreign Minister Mbusa Nyamwisi may also attend.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: Singh approached us following his meeting with Kayembe and Mayala to inquire if we had any news of AF Senior Adviser Tim Shortley's planned meeting with Kabila. "Our plans all depend on you," he said. Comment.